Imagine Education recognized for innovative approach to math education

July 20, 2011

Taos startup uses $600,000 worth of funding to advance its novel way of teaching math

TAOS, New Mexico, July, 20 2011—Imagine Education, a Taos-based educational game startup company that seeks to change the way middle-school math is taught, last month earned a half-million-dollar Next Generation Learning Challenges grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.
The $500,000 grant resulted in part from financial and other assistance previously provided by Los Alamos National Laboratory and Los Alamos National Security, LLC, the company that manages and operates the Lab.
Imagine Education has endeavored to remake the way middle-school math is taught through its first-of-its-kind, story-based, online math game, called Ko's Journey.
Scott Laidlaw, Ed.D., and partner Jennifer Harris, CPA, CMA, founded Imagine Education to address the fact that students have trouble with math because it is typically taught in abstract terms with no relevance to daily life. Ko's Journey turns that paradigm on its head by embedding math within an engaging story that creates a purpose for learning. The game was initially piloted at the Roots & Wings Community School in Questa, New Mexico, where—sponsored by Los Alamos National Laboratory's Community Programs Office—it increased math proficiency from 28 percent to 80 percent.
Imagine Education's unique, story-based approach offers a positive, emotional response to math that differentiates the company from other educational game competitors and startups. "In most math games, math is disconnected from the concept," says Laidlaw. "An asteroid explodes because the equation is solved, or a character wins points. Once again, math disconnected from purpose, which, over time, hurts student learning, even if there is momentary excitement about animation. At Imagine Education, we take a fundamentally different approach by using stories—one of the very oldest architectures of human learning and teaching."
Los Alamos National Laboratory began working with Imagine Education in 2010 through its economic development initiative, Northern New Mexico Connect. The company has received expert coaching and market research assistance from Northern New Mexico Connect, as well as support from LANL master of business administration interns. In June 2010, Northern New Mexico Connect awarded the company a $100,000 Venture Acceleration Fund grant to expand its user base nationally. VAF invests in innovative

Northern New Mexico companies seeking to commercialize technology and take it to market faster through such activities as proof-of-concept, prototyping, securing initial customers, or additional funding.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation made $500,000 awards to 19 innovative, technology-enabled programs that are helping students master math and literacy aligned with the Common Core State Standards, a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The grant will enable Imagine Education to pilot Ko's Journey in 10 schools nationwide, expanding its reach beyond the 2,500 students currently using the program in public, private, charter, virtual, and home schools. The grant also will fund a forum to help pilot-school teachers and Imagine Education integrate the new curriculum in the classroom.

For more information, visit www.kosjourney.com.

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